Correctness of Telephone Bill

1575. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any system to check the correctness of the Telephone Bills dispatched through website or published in Newspapers;

(b) whether Government propose to introduce the system of checking, the correctness of the telephone bills as is being followed in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh; and

(c) if so, by when it would be introduced?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) Telephone bills are issued based on meter readings for subscribers. For bills, which show an abnormal increase in the calling pattern, checks have been prescribed in BSNL and MTNL. The telephone bills on website are a replica of the actual bills and do not thus require further checks for accuracy. Telephone bills are not published in newspaper.

(b) and (c) The Govt. no longer handles the operations of telecom (including billing). BSNL, however, has billing software standardized for most of its Circles whereby checks for accuracy exists.

Affordable Telephone connectivity

1576. SHRI RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any plans to provide affordable telecom connectivity to the people living in rural areas far away from the cities and towns;

(b) whether the recent Government's decision to permit basic telephone operators to enhance monthly rental, reduce number of free calls and pulse rate would adversely affect extension of telecom connectivity to rural areas;

(c) whether the basic service providers had themselves asked for such increase in rates; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) New Telecom Policy- 1999 has as one of the objectives to provide affordable telecom connectivity to the people living in rural areas far away from the cities and towns.

(b) to (d) As per Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act 1997, TRAI prescribes the rates at which the telecommunication services within India shall be provided. TRAI follows the practice of consultation with the various stake holders. During the tariff review exercise, repeatedly it was brought out by the basic service providers that the tariff for these services are below cost and needed to be aligned with costs. As it is not possible to prescribe fully cost based tariffs for basic services, an attempt has been made to move towards that direction. It has been reported by TRAI that the recent tariff order issued by TRAI to enhance monthly rental, reduced number of free calls and pulse rate, will have marginal effect only for high usage subscribers. Further, it has also been reported by TRAI that most of the local calls are of less than 2 minutes duration and hence reduction in pulse rate will not have any significant impact. The new tariff announced has not made any change in the monthly rental for rural areas. However, change in definition or rural subscriber may have impact on rural subscribers.

Foreign Capital Investment

†1577. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that foreign capital investment is allowed in communication sector;

(b) if so, the foreign capital investment in this sector till the end of the year 2002;

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.